

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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CHRIST AS OUR OBJECT

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JL I have been thinking, beloved brethren, of two things that are essential to the saints: one is that we must be preserved with Christ as our Object, and the second is that in order to fully satisfy the purpose of God, we must be brought into conformity to Christ Himself. It may be, if the Lord will, we can consider some thoughts concerning Christ as our Object in this reading and then in the second reading we may consider the matter of being brought into conformity to Christ. In order to help in our enquiry together I have drawn from these five different sections of Scripture with five particular thoughts in mind in relation to that first part of the subject. In the first passage in Romans, I thought we might see how there is a starting point in Christ being presented as an Object for our faith, One in whom we may trust and believe, in view of salvation and blessing from God. In Luke 10, we find that Christ is rather presented as Teacher and Model before Mary, as the One from whom we may all learn, and find in Him a model. In the third passage in 2 Corinthians, I thought we might see how He is presented for our contemplation. It is a very necessary thing to be increasingly engaged with Christ in our affections and to consider His glory as an Object for our affections in a contemplative way. In the Song of Songs, I thought we might be helped to think of Christ then becoming an Object adoringly. I believe there is somewhat of a sequence in the thoughts, and I trust we may be helped in looking into them. Lastly, in Philippians, I thought we might get some encouragement in clinging to Christ as the Object of our hope. We still await the fulfilment of our hope to be with Him and to be like Him where He is, but we need to be preserved in continually looking unto Jesus and having Him as the hope before our hearts in the midst of a darkening world. Do you think that might be of some profit for us?

RWMcC I think so. To be occupied with Christ is essential. I am looking forward to seeing how this develops, but it is interesting that the first enquiry is as to faith, and the final one as to hope. These things go together, do they not?

JL Yes, faith and hope. I had the definite impression that it is not

only essential from our side to be preserved with Christ as our Object, but it is according to the Father's delight, because His intention clearly is to head up everything in the Christ so that He should be the Object of all in the universe, Eph 1: 10. I think it is very evident that it is part of the prime service of the Holy Spirit here to preserve us with Christ as our Object. We can see that it is according to the pleasure of divine Persons as well as a necessity from our side.

RWMcC It is good to seize hold of that, that it is what divine Persons desire and gives them joy, because there is fruit thereby by contemplating Christ and being formed by that.

JL Yes, I am sure that is true. Think of the pleasure of God then in setting forth Christ as a mercy-seat. That is what we seek to do in the glad tidings. In harmony with God's activities in grace, we seek to present Christ as an Object in order that souls may be helped through the work of God in them to come to trust in the Lord and believe on Him. I was thinking, for example, about the jailor. There was not much time for Paul and Silas to communicate anything to him in his extremity but immediately they presented Christ as an Object for him: "What must I do that I may be saved?" The answer was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus", Acts 16: 30, 31. They put that Object before him.

RDP Is it immediate, "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus", and then it says, "whom God has set forth"? So immediately there is the distinguishing of the Person from the world.

JL That is excellent, so that God is not only presenting the *means* of our salvation and blessing but the *Person* in whom it essentially has to be found. That is just part of my exercise that we must be preserved with Christ as our Object. We may say this is very foundational in the gospel but it is not foundational in the sense that it is something we start with and then forget about and go on to something else. It is fundamental to our entire progress to be preserved with Christ before us, do you think?

HTF Christ will be our Object eternally. That is God's thought for us, but the preservation in view of that is now. Do you think also that this is God's delight? We are brought into conformity with what is of delight to God. I think that is what you have said as to the second reading. We are brought into conformity but that is to exercise us now as we have this before us.

JL I have no doubt that is true. I think it is a present, important necessity. You referred to Christ as being our eternal Object. I have no doubt that will be so, but I am also assured there will be no intrusive element to hinder it from being so. There are plenty of things now that might divert us and turn away our attention and engage our interests and sadly focus them on other things so it is a very urgent exercise to be maintained with Christ as our Object at the present time.

KM We sang in our hymn 110:

Blessed, almighty Creator art Thou!

Would you say a few words about that, please?

JL I was encouraged by the hymn, and as we proceed in our enquiry together, we may rather more come to the point of considering Christ as the great Object for the worship of our affections. He rightly bears these titles of honour and glory that serve to bring out the personal greatness that belongs to Him. I think we may have a starting-point here in that He is presented as a mercy-seat, an Object for our faith, in view of coming into the joy of salvation and blessing and being justified through trusting in Him. As we go on in our souls, one would trust in the case of each one of us, He would become greater and greater so that finally we would have Him before us as the great Object of the worship of our hearts. Think of the man in John 9, brought to bow before the Son of God. What rapid progress he made in his soul!

PM In the old dispensation Jehovah said as to the mercy-seat, "And there will I meet with thee, and will speak with thee", Exod 25: 22. Is that so in this blessed Person who has been set forth in this way?

JL Very good. I am sure that is perfectly true. The circumstances previously could not permit the full outshining of the heart of God. Indeed it says in a previous verse in Romans, "now without law righteousness of God is manifested, borne witness to by the law and the prophets" (v 21). There is an indication that something superior has come in in the Person whom God is now setting forth because in Him His love has been expressed, and through Him all that's God's holy will required has been accomplished. What an Object for our hearts!

DCB So do we first see that Christ is God's Object, and see how much the mercy-seat meant to God? The blood was on the mercy-seat; God was satisfied.

JL That is good. Say more about that, because as far as we are

concerned God has presented Him, set Him forth a mercy-seat, although the way we are given to understand something of God's appreciation of Him is seen in the place of exultation He has on the throne at His right hand.

DCB The mercy-seat is a wonderful matter. We see how God was going to have a rest there; how God was going to speak there as has been referred to; everything was settled according to His glory and satisfaction there; and He being satisfied in that, He sets Him forth so that we can come into the blessing and the enjoyment of what God is already satisfied with.

JL The very term "a mercy-seat" conveys that, does it not? It was undeserved and yet it has been in the mind and heart of God to present Christ in that way, setting Him forth, "has set forth a mercy-seat".

RWMcC In setting forth Christ a mercy-seat, speaking reverently, it is not hidden behind curtains.

JL Yes, I have often thought about that. There is no obscurity or confusion in the gospel whatsoever. God has made His mind abundantly clear and, in marvellous mercy, has set forth Christ in that way to make it, we may say, utterly simple for souls. The children would often be accustomed in education these days to questions with multiple choices available and a selection required of what might be appropriate, but that is not like the gospel. God has made it singular in its blessed presentation, has He not?

I was thinking then of Mary, one who must have come to learn something of the blessedness of what was to be found in Christ, and it seemed as if the great desire of her heart was just to be found at His feet "listening to his word". Safe ground! I think I could justifiably say that sadly there has been a good deal of confusion come in amongst us because of a variety of confusing communications, and a variety of opinions being expressed, and the more I go on the more I see the necessity of having Christ before me. There is a simple blessedness preserved through having Christ continually before us as the One whose voice we have to hearken to. Mary was there at the feet of Jesus "listening to his word". What would you say about that?

AM I was thinking she chose that place at His feet. And I was thinking of the verse reportedly found in Mr Darby's Bible -

Low at thy feet, Lord Jesus;
This is the place for me.

JL Such a blessed place! We are on safe ground there, are we not? It may be others can help us and it is intended that that should be so through the help that comes in in the body. We appreciate, I trust, the gifts given and the resources under the wisdom of the Lord Jesus that have been made available. I am not despising that, neither should any of us here, but I can clearly see that through all there is a divine necessity of being preserved with Christ as our Object, “looking stedfastly” on Him (Heb 12: 2), and, as it was in this setting, sitting at His feet. We seek to make way for that in a reading like this, with ears open to hear what the Lord might say.

AM It does not appear that Mary says anything; she is just absorbed with one Object and drinking in what flows from Him.

JL Very good.

RDP It was a necessary service. Martha's service was necessary and, of itself, it was nothing which was out of order, but how easy it is for such things to become a distraction away from the central thing, do you think?

JL I trust no one present feels I am being critical, therefore, in drawing on this scripture because, if we take the circumstances here in Grimsby, we are not at all unmindful of the heavy burden that lies upon those locally to carry out the needed services for the provision of what is required among the saints today; we value that. But there is a constant need, through all, in grace and guidance, to be preserved with Christ before our affections continually, do you not think?

RDP Yes, I do. All I was meaning was that it was Martha's house. She “received him into her house”. She had responsibilities as to the necessary service, and yet it deteriorated somehow to almost a criticism of the Lord, which is a serious thing, so that your point is that the Lord is to be the Centre. When they brought the woman taken in adultery in John 8, they “set her in the midst” (v 3); the midst belongs to Jesus, not to the problem.

JL How true that is! He alone is worthy to have that place and He alone can fill it, and the good part for us is to give Him that place in our heart's affections: “Mary has chosen the good part”.

RDW Was Mary in subjection here at the feet of the Lord? You referred to opinions and things like that. There is no place for those before the Lord, is there, if we are in subjection to Him? It is what the Lord says that matters not what I would have in mind.

JL Yes, that is very good. Is it not repeatedly called attention to in regard of Mary that she was at the feet of the Lord Jesus: falling at His feet (John 11: 32), anointing His feet (chap 12: 3), and in this passage here, sitting at His feet? It seemed to be a place that she loved to take in honour of the Lord Jesus and in that way she expresses her affection for the Lord. She seeks to learn from Him and later anoints His feet, expressing her outstanding love for Him at such an opportunity. It is truly a right place to be in, is it not?

PM In John 11 Martha says to Mary, "The teacher is come and calls thee", v 28. Had Martha got the gain of this? He was known in that household as "the teacher".

JL That is a good point. I appreciate that reference. She had come round a long way in that respect, was learning perhaps the value of this good place that Mary had taken, and was now seeking to avail herself of that opportunity, was she?

HTF I was thinking of John 12 and also Acts 9: 13-17. Do you think when we need the adjustment we are speaking of, part of where we are is thinking the Lord has got it wrong somehow, but then we come round to the fact that it is we who need the adjustment and not the Lord. That was Ananias's lesson, and that was Martha's lesson, and so with all of us, do you think?

JL It was Paul's lesson too in Acts 9. Mary chose the good part here, but Paul was abruptly brought down to that point, was he not, subdued in the presence of Christ? How much he so quickly began to learn from the One who is to be our Object in view of enjoying these communications. Think of Paul being able to say later on, "I received from the Lord", 1 Cor 11: 23. Think of what He had learned from the Lord as the great Object of his heart's affection, having seen Him in glory. What a unique view he had! Paul said it was like an abortion (1 Cor 15: 8); it seemed out of place according to time but he had grasped that wonderful view of Christ, had he not?

JB1 Do you have in mind the Lord Jesus being Model as well as Teacher?

JL I was thinking particularly of the reference in Peter's epistle where Christ is referred to as Model, "leaving you a model", 1 Pet 2: 21. I suppose considering the Model, or, as the footnote says, it is 'A copy, as we say, to write from', there is something we learn about Him and learn from Him. Would that be right? We get something set out in

supreme blessedness in Christ Himself so that we should have an ear to hear His words and take account of these features that marked the Lord Jesus. They are intended by the Spirit to grasp our affections and create a longing to become more like Him, are they? What would you say about it?

JB So she was in the presence of the Lord Jesus, at His feet, and she was going to see where His footsteps led, and that was a model for her, do you think, in her life?

JL Yes, very much so. I think in that respect it has a bearing on the third thought that I made mention of and that was considering Christ in a contemplative way. We learn from Him in that way. John says in his gospel that they had “contemplated his glory” (John 1: 14), and then in his epistle, in writing to the saints, “That ... which we have seen with our eyes; that which we contemplated, and our hands handled, concerning the word of life”, 1 John 1: 1. The apostles had that peculiar privilege of considering Christ and contemplating Him in actuality when here with Him, but we now have the blessed service of the Holy Spirit to engage our hearts with Christ in a contemplative way. I think there is a great need for that amongst us in order that we should be expanded in our affections. Perhaps you can help us about that.

JB Mary was deliberate in setting aside time for Him, and contemplation is something we need to be deliberate about.

JL That is very good. That would be very true in a world where there is so much pressure upon people. There is a lot of pressure on many persons and life increasingly goes at a more rapid pace in the world in which, as yet, we are. I can say looking back on my own experiences that there is definite profit in taking time to contemplate the glories of the Lord Jesus.

RWMcC I feel very challenged by what is said.

RDP Do you think the way the Lord responds to Martha is a model for us? It could have said, I suppose, that Jesus rebuked her, but it says, “But Jesus answering said to her”, and the first thing He says is, “thou art careful and troubled about many things”. He gives credit to what lay behind the exclamation that had come in before going on. Do you think there is a model in the way the Lord meets what could have been a difficult situation?

JL That is very good. In that respect to some extent the gospels are presented before us so that we may learn from the way the Lord

Jesus did things. He is presented as a model and we have the instruction of His personal words, but we see the way that the Lord handled things. Clearly Peter who served later had learned something of the pattern with which the Lord carried things out and acted himself in a different way as he went on in the testimony from what might have characterised his impulsive ways in early life. In a marvellous way Christ is presented as a model for our consideration.

RDP Paul on his departure from Ephesus says, “Ye know how I was with you ... and tears, and temptations, which happened to me through the plots of the Jews”, Acts 20: 18, 19. We can only imagine what all that was but it was there in that assembly. He says, “how I was with you”, and “how I held back nothing” (v 20), and “all the counsel of God” (v 27) came out. But what he speaks about is not the 'what' he had said but the “how” he had been amongst them.

JL Do you think that is a much needed thing in the way that we seek to work out exercises amongst ourselves and how we speak to one another and how we handle things? We need to learn from Christ as model. How would the Lord have handled such a matter? I think we have to learn from Him in that respect. We surely need immediate guidance from Him to know His mind about particular matters, but there is a pattern to be taken account of in the Scriptures from which we learn from Christ as a model.

DCB Is His simple address, “Martha, Martha”, an example to us, His affectionate address to the sister before He brings in anything to correct?

JL Sometimes the repetition is used in Scripture just to arrest particular attention, but you were thinking that there is almost a gracious appeal behind the Lord saying, “Martha, Martha”, as if He was just making an appeal to her heart's affections and winning her round?

GJR I see the need of all this.

JL The passage read in 2 Corinthians 3 bears on this. You said you felt the need of what we were speaking about and I take it home to my own heart as well. The apostle says there, “But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord”. There is need of each one of us individually taking up this exercise to be occupied in a contemplative way with Christ in order that the collective benefits should be secured.

GJR Is it fair to say when we read this scripture that if we look on the glory of the Lord, we will be changed? Is this an inevitable

consequence? Are we right to read it like that?

JL Mr Stoney went as far as to indicate, I believe, that when truly experienced, it brings about an entire change, JBS vol 2 p261-262. I think he was particularly referring to the metamorphic process. You cannot change a butterfly back into a caterpillar, can you? There is such a change brought about that it remains as an abiding change. Well, I feel challenged about that too but would seek increasingly and especially at the Lord's Supper week by week where we have the privilege of being freshly occupied with His glories as He comes in amongst us that there should be a change that might remain.

PM The change remained with Peter after the experience on the mount: "eyewitnesses of *his* majesty ... being with him on the holy mountain", 2 Pet 1: 16, 18. They were beholding the glory of the Lord, were they not?

JL Yes, I think that is very good. The change remained and it seemed in his experience, and in that of Paul's as well, that things not only became changed but became continually enlarged the more the process was continued.

PM I wondered if the result of that change was not only to affect Peter individually but it was there in the assembly. There was something in the assembly that had never been there before.

JL Is that a little implied in the words here, "But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed"? No doubt it involves what is individually experienced by each of the saints, but collectively that benefit comes in and remains in the assembly through the resulting work of change and formation.

HTF "We know that if it is manifested we shall be like him", 1 John 3: 2. That will be instantaneous but it is right perhaps to ask why this is a test when applied to ourselves. Am I the same as I was? If I am, that tells me and everybody else something. Have I been contemplating Christ? I find it very testing.

JL Well, the apostle was interested through the report brought to him to find out how the saints were getting on. What a challenging thing that is. Is there progress, is there evidence that I have been engaged with the transforming glory of the Lord Jesus? One would seek for that. I just feel encouraged in presenting the exercise among us that we might all be stimulated in taking it up more fully.

GJR There is reference in Ezekiel to the prince and the people of the land; when the prince comes in, he goes out by the same door that he came in, chap 44: 3. When the people of the land come in to worship, they go out by a different door, chap 46: 9.

JL I was looking at that section recently and enjoying that thought. He remains unchanged in all His personal glory, but your point is that by going out a different way there is the evidence that something has been secured among the people, among ourselves. Say more for our help.

GJR You have put it so well, but it is good to remember that He remains the Same.

RDP The section in 2 Corinthians refers to Israel's darkness, "the veil lies upon their heart", v 16. "When it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away", and one of the most intractable problems of the modern world is as to the race, but "when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away", a change that will never be reversed when it comes.

JL Very good. That will be truly accomplished in Israel, but what would you say about the present portion of the saints as helped by the Spirit to look upon the unveiled face of Christ in all His glory? Is that not a wonderful present privilege granted to the saints of the assembly?

RDP I was going to ask you to help us as to how this comes about. This would involve "looking on the glory of the Lord". That is a vast subject. Is this a specific glory or is it individual? It must involve the collective side.

JL Well, I get the impression it must be taken up individually, but there is collective benefit resulting from it as the saints are merged in occupation with the glory of Christ. I do think it not only has a bearing on our individual exercises but has a special place in the privilege of what we enjoy when the Lord comes in amongst us on the first day of the week, do you not think? What glories are brought to our view! Do we go to the Supper and come away unchanged, or is there some enriched apprehension in our souls following what has engaged our hearts as occupied with the Lord Jesus? If I truly apprehend the presence of the Lord, there must be some change, must there not?

DCB This chapter has the new covenant particularly in mind, and the glory He has as "mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 9: 15); and, of course, that would follow as we have the cup before us, and the new covenant before us. We have here distinctly the glory that the Lord Jesus has as "mediator of a new covenant". Does that especially have

a transforming effect for us?

JL Yes, that helps. It would include the thought, would it not, that He is the Administrator then of divine blessing? All the blessings flowing out from the heart of God in the new covenant are administered by Christ Himself, and the overflowing benefits of these reach out to the saints of the present family, do they not? Our brother has been referring to Israel, and rather specifically the new covenant has its bearing on those of Israel, but the overflowing blessedness is administered by Christ towards us now, is it not? "Now the Lord is the Spirit".

RWMcC Is that why it uses the word "Lord" here? I was thinking of the present bearing of it. We need to recognise His lordship, do we not? For Israel it is particularly the Messiah, the Christ. In the glad tidings we speak about Jesus, but it is important to accept Him as Saviour *and* Lord, is it not?

JL Sometimes that expression involves the exercise of His supreme rights in authority; I should not say sometimes for that always remains so. What I am rather trying to convey is that while that particular aspect is sometimes emphasised it also conveys that the administration of all divine blessing has been committed into His hands towards the saints. In that way we can think of the Lord as the One through whom the fulness of divine blessing is communicated towards us.

DCB You certainly see the expansion of what is in that divine administration, but the reference that our brother brought in as to Israel, and how they come into the blessing of it as the veil is removed from their heart, is an example for us, that we are going to get into this fulness and blessing as it is a matter that affects our *hearts*, and our hearts have nothing between them and Christ.

JL Israel as a nation has lost out meantime because Christ is not their Object. They have set aside the Messiah. They have lost Christ as Object and hence there is importance for us, by way of contrast, in taking up the exercise, all the more, to be preserved with Christ before us and enjoying the blessed fulness of all that is flowing out from the heart of God through this Person who is surely Lord and Christ.

AM Moses desired to see His glory and he was not able to. Jehovah said, "thou shalt see me from behind", Exod 33: 23. Is it not a wonderful thing that in this day we see an unveiled face, the glory

expressed in a blessed face available to us?

JL How blessed to see His unveiled face and to see in Him all that we shall ever know and learn of God. Perhaps you can help us about that? In that unveiled face God's glory is expressed towards us.

AM Yes; the following chapter is "the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God" in that face, v 6. It is a wonderful thing to think that it is in the face of a Man!

JL Very good! In that respect, as having Christ as my Object, I have everything before me, because what else can I learn or know of God outside of Christ? The fulness of all the expression of what God is, the effulgence of His glory, radiates in the blessed face of that Man, the Lord of glory.

RDP "Looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face" has a particular link at the Supper with the taking of the cup. Sometimes we may be tested more as to what we can say in giving thanks for the cup, but as seeking the glory of the opening up and acknowledging "the Lord", we move on in the service quickly. Think of a scripture like Colossians 1 where the greatness of Christ almost bursts on the scene! Think of the greatness of what the blood is! Perhaps we are limited in our thoughts.

JL It may be, and I would accept too that we may feel limitation in our thoughts, but it is not the divine intention that that should be, because it is the very point at which our hearts and affections should be entirely liberated through the blessedness of all that the new covenant represents. It should really trigger a spring in our affections, and specially so as we have some living apprehension of Christ being before us. We need the help of the Spirit for that. The apostles had the opportunity to see with their eyes and hear with their ears and handle with their hands, but we are cast upon the service of the Holy Spirit, but that does not take away from the reality of the blessedness. It may be the actuality of His presence we still await, but the reality is our living portion now by the Spirit, is it not?

RDP "Even as by the Lord the Spirit". The main thought in the blood is what is for God in its fulness, and I was thinking of all that comes into our thoughts. Perhaps it is just a personal exercise, that I feel more tested in giving thanks for the cup than the loaf.

JL That might take us to our next scripture in the Song of Songs. If we feel challenged in relation to what we can say about the glory of the

Lord, it is a little like what happened here: "What is thy beloved more than another beloved ... ?". How readily she takes up the challenge of that question and enlarges upon His many glories and the place that her Beloved clearly had in her heart. I only suggested reading verse 16 where we have something of a summary brought in following the intimate place that He had gained in her heart's affections. She concludes, "Yea, he is altogether lovely". I often go over that little section and delight to think of Christ as the supreme Object of our affections. How adoringly our hearts would rise! How responsively, not only in answer to His many glories, but especially in worship in relation to the greatness of His Person as well.

PM Do we not find in this glorious face what is incomparable? At one time His face was "marred more than any man" (Isa 52: 14); it was beyond compare. But now it is radiant with glory and with the expression of all that is in God's heart, and it is incomparable.

JL I must say I was very touched last week pondering over the Lord's own words, conveyed to John in the Revelation, "I became dead", chap 1: 18. Think of the Lord saying that, "I became dead". What a way the Lord went in suffering love! It is true to say He was put to death by men, crucified, but no one could take His life from Him: "I became dead". He yielded up His life in death but now He is the living One, and all the glory of God radiates in the face of that blessed Man. What a thing to have Christ as our Object, to be occupied with the effulgence of His glory, the effulgence of God's glory finding its expression in the face of Jesus!

PM Would it be right to say that it waited for Him to be in the position in which He is that the fulness of that glory should be known?

JL I am sure that is right because for one reason all that had to be accomplished to satisfy the Godhead necessarily had to be done, but then, for us to take account of these things, we are cast upon the gift and service of the Holy Spirit, are we not? And that could not be put upon sinful flesh. It required the work of Christ to secure us on the ground of redemption and set us free in righteousness before God in order that we might be vessels suitable to be granted the gift of the Holy Spirit and given the capacity to be occupied then with Christ adoringly.

RWMcC The expression, and it is a wonderful expression, "Yea, he is altogether lovely" would show that in every way that we contemplate Him as an Object He is perfect, is He not?

JL In every way! We cannot trace a thing in Christ that would bring about disappointment or any negative feeling in our hearts at all. Oh to be more like this, to be able to be so engaged with Him that we continually and increasingly prove that He is “altogether lovely”!

RWMcC It may be as we go through exercises in our lives that a particular aspect comes before us of these various things that she brings out, but it is wonderful that in all of these things, He does not change; He is always the same and He is always perfect.

JL Why are so many of our brethren going through suffering at the present time? Do you not think in the wisdom of the Lord a variety of ways are taken to wean us away from other things and to help us increasingly to have the yearnings of our hearts focused upon Himself as the great Object to satisfy our hearts affections, and to bring out this spirit of adoration in a responsive way?

JB What a lovely expression, “my beloved”! The simplicity and depth of that expression is very real, and I am tested as to whether I can really speak of the Lord Jesus as “my beloved”.

JL When she was asked the question, “What is thy beloved more than another beloved ...?”. What difference is there? When she takes up the challenge she says, “my beloved”, and then pours out these expressions of her appreciation. I almost read from Psalm 45 because in Psalm 45 it is direct appreciation that is expressed, in type, to the Lord Himself. Here she is giving descriptive words to others, but it is a fine thing to be able to speak directly to the Lord Jesus in appreciation of our Beloved. What would you say about that?

JB I like the expression. It is pouring out here; it is the result of her contemplation and appreciation of the sweetness of His mouth.

JL Pouring out, somewhat like, “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer” (Ps 45: 1), and then there is the direct ascription of adoration, “Thou art fairer than the sons of men” (v 2) and so on. It is a fine thing to be liberated in your heart to pour out adoringly your responsive affection towards Christ as the Object of your heart.

AM I was just going to ask about the reference, “His mouth is most sweet”. Verses 10-15 describe what she sees from His head to His legs and then she says, “His mouth is most sweet”. As contemplating the beauty of what she sees, she is conscious of receiving it from Him.

JL It seems to be an expression that conveys a particular intimacy,

“His mouth is most sweet”. I have reflected sometimes on the reference in chapter 7 when the Beloved is speaking of the Object of His love and comes to verse 9 and says, “And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine, ...”, and then there is an interruption, the only one in the whole of the Song. It seems as if she was so affected by what He was saying that she interrupts, as it were, to say, “That goeth down smoothly for my beloved” as if she would just be so affected by these expressions of intimate affection, do you think?

HTF The challenge is really to compare Him with somebody else: “What is thy beloved more than another beloved”, but she does not really do that, does she? Her answer is that there is nobody to compare with.

JL Very good. We often say He is beyond compare but we are limited by language to give suited expression so we would employ such expressions as she employs here. For example, “The chiefest among ten thousand” that is a comparative term, but when she comes to the part we read at the end, “Yea, he is altogether lovely”, that is not a comparative expression. It is just an exclusive outburst that He alone is worthy of, such an expression of personal honour to the Beloved. Is that what was in your mind?

HTF On the mountain Peter thought of making three tabernacles and then he really learned that there was no comparison, Matt 17: 4, 5.

JL The Father's intervention served to bring that about: “*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him”.

HTF John the apostle was characteristically an adoring person through His contemplation of Christ, and that is so telling in relation to his gospel. He was in the bosom of Jesus, chap 13: 23. That seemed to be a characteristic place. I just wondered with the earlier reference to “we all”: that seems a remarkably exclusive or inclusive thing, but do you think in a sense even if just one of the company is in that position, then there is a side in which we all benefit from it?

JL I am sure that is right. We are often made conscious that the expression by one of enjoyed intimacy in love tends to stimulate the heart's affections of us all and lifts us up and helps us all to be drawn into it.

In Philippians 3 where we read I was thinking of the increasingly dark days, and perhaps difficult times that we are in, and our preservation, I do believe, is continually keeping our eye upon Christ as

the Object of our hope, the goal before us. “I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. What a hope Paul had in his heart! That helps to preserve us in a straight course in difficult times, otherwise we may wander and get into confusion, but if Christ is kept as the singular Object before our hearts’ affections, it helps us to move in a straight path.

RWMcC The prize is different to the goal. Our eye needs to be on the goal, not the prize.

JL That is true, but enlarge on it a little.

RWMcC I do not know that I could, but I just thought that, that there is a prize. In Christianity we all get the prize in that sense; there is no winner or second and third; but we need to keep our eye on the goal as otherwise we will be distracted.

JL In a sense the reference here to the prize is not any exclusive honour for me or for you but rather the great blessedness of being brought into the accomplishment of the purpose of God in love for the saints. That is the prize: it is “the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”.

RWMcC That would link with what we touched in the Song, “he is altogether lovely”. That is really the prize in a sense, do you think, “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”, the appreciation of Him?

JL I suppose the fulness of the thought is that we are really brought into the enjoyment of sonship to be with Christ, to be like Him and to share in all the favour that has been bestowed upon us because of the Beloved.

PM Could you please help me as to this expression, “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”? What does that convey?

JL I understand that to include the purpose of God for me and the purpose of God for you. Why has God taken you up, and why has He taken me up? Not only to extricate me from the misery I was in and under the sentence of judgment because of my sins, but it is “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”. It is the purpose of His love for the saints in view of the place of favour they should have before Him in sonship eternally, is it not?

PM We often speak of “being with Christ, for it is very much better” (Phil 1: 23) and infinitely glorious, but I think what you say is very helpful and would lift our heart to be here in the gain of what our hope is, would

it not? The character of it might mark us now.

JL I have no doubt it includes the place we shall be brought into, but I think the calling involves more than that. It seems to be a direct link with the purpose of God in taking me up. That is a very exalted thought.

DCB One of the things that affects you as you read this is that it is a desire. You could ask about the apostle, 'Who has a greater knowledge and appreciation of the calling, of the light and the truth?'. But he is still concerned to have the energy to enjoy it more, and to enter into it more.

JL Yes, and to keep the light of that before his soul. I think we need to do that in these times as well so that we may be preserved from flagging and discouragement, because the calling of God has not changed. I recall a reference in Mr Raven's ministry (vol 1 p155) where he says, 'I do not know anything more comforting to the Christian heart than to know that God can never be diverted from His purpose'. We may say we are in difficult days, in testing times, but God has not cancelled or altered His purpose in any way. He has called us with a holy and a high and heavenly calling and that still stands. Our hope is preserved in keeping Christ before us, moving towards the goal.

RWMcC Does Romans 8 link with your thought, "But whom he has predestinated, these also he has called; and whom he has called, these also he has justified; but whom he has justified, these also he has glorified", v 30? Does that link with God's purpose?

JL Yes, it may be that will come into our fuller consideration in our following reading because it is preceded by the comment, "he has also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son" (v 29), and then he goes on to all these other matters. Yes, I think that is all in mind in the hope of the calling, "the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus".

Grimsby

9th June 2018

Key to Initials:

D C Brown, Edinburgh; H T Franklin, Grimsby; J B Ikin, Manchester; J Laurie, Brechin; K Marshall, Colchester; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; P Martin, Colchester; R W McClean, Grimsby; R D Plant, Birmingham; G J Richards, Malvern; R D Wallace, Spaldwick

GOD'S MAN

Neil C McKay

Genesis 5: 21-24

Isaiah 53: 1-6

Romans 5: 12-21

Matthew 15: 21-28

I am impressed by the greatness of what came in in one Man, the man Christ Jesus, that had previously been lacking. We know that, as scripture says, God "saw that there was no man", Isa 59: 16. When Christ came in, He found everything in Him. It is a most striking fact that God always had in mind to set up the Lord Jesus as the great Head of all creation; the whole creation was to look to Christ and to find everything in Him. That was to be man's means of salvation, man's means of everything. Man was created by God and fell into sin, and has definite needs and wants, but God decreed that these would be met by a Man, and that Man would be Christ. And *that* Man is the Head, the Head of every man. Mr Darby said you could ask the man in the street if he answered to the Head (see FER vol 13 p233); that is, He is available to every man to hold as Head. There are few titles quite like that. As the Son of man, He is available to every man, but man must claim Him in that way; but He *is* Head of every man; He has a place in regard to every man, even though he might not get the gain of it

Adam was not the head of every man as Christ is. In a certain sense there was headship set out in him, in that as an innocent man before he fell, something was intended to be set out in him. He was never truly the head as God purposed; he was the figure. It says in Romans where we read, "the figure of him to come". So, Eve, and Adam's offspring, and others, might have looked at Adam as a person would look to Christ now, to find a right influence and what they would need in him, but they never found any such thing in him. He fell: he gave them sin; he gave them corruption. He gave them evil thoughts; he gave them sinfulness. And it struck me immensely that after Adam died, man had no head; everything waited on Christ coming in. From then on all that God had intended that man should get from headship waited for Christ coming in. There were persons saved at that time, and the reason any of them was saved was because of the work of Christ. Every man and woman that was saved, was saved through faith in God, by believing in God; and therefore God must bring in salvation. He must bring in the Christ, the Messiah, who would save

them, even though they had died before His incoming - a most remarkable matter.

We read in Genesis in regard to Enoch. It is difficult to understand what it was like in Enoch's day; things were primitive then; as far as we know, there were no governments - they had not been set up under Noah. There would have been no police; no formal organisation of society. There was no law such as Israel was given; man did not know by any formal outline how God was to be pleased. There was no ceremonial system; there was no tabernacle system; there was no formal approach to God. There were no altars; there was nothing like that. And man, in that time, got worse and worse every day as if there was no restraint. The evil that went on in those days was such that God sought to destroy man from off the face of the earth; it was so bad. It seems that if something happened persons had no recourse; the only hope they would have had was in God. You know what they looked for, and what they needed? - a Man. Faith did not look for a civilized society; that was not going to help them much. We are thankful for the order it has brought, but what they needed was a Man; they needed a Head. Enoch is a striking example of this. What did man have until Christ came in? He had to rely on God; that was what he had.

When the law of Moses came in, it gave man an idea of what would please God, but all it did was condemn him. As we read in Romans, God sent the law in order to make plain the sin, to bring it to light. It says that, "the law came in in order that the offence might abound". That is, the reason that God gave the law was so that man might realise that he was a sinner, because he could not keep it. God brought the law in as a provision for man in that way. And man used it to try and justify himself, only proving that he was further and further from God. It just shows the stark contrast of what there was before Christ came in, and what there is when Christ has come in. No doubt there were faithful men, men of God, friends of God. It speaks of Moses and Abraham, persons whom God found, and Enoch was one of these; he walked with God. It tells us in Jude what he found in God; he waited on the Lord coming amidst his holy myriads (v 14); he recognised what was due to God. He saw what was extant in the world at that time, and that the constant decline was not what was due to God; God could not have that, nor could God have that continue. It is a slight on God that His own creation should go on in sinfulness. God must come in amidst His holy myriads and execute judgment on it. Enoch recognised what

was due to God. His prophecy might not be the gospel but it is true, none the less. Mr Darby points out that if a man has a son, and the son goes on in sinfulness, he can go with that son in patience; and plead with him and try with him, but if at some point the man does not say to that son, 'you are wrong', and chastise him for that sin, then the man is guilty of condoning and going on with it, Collected Writings vol 1 p333-4. God cannot condone sin and cannot go on with it. At some point God will come in in judgment. But not at this point; at this point, God is going on in grace. We will come to that in these other scriptures.

Peter speaks of those prophets who sought out, or searched out what kind of Man would come in. "Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them pointed out, testifying before of the sufferings which belonged to Christ, and the glories after these. To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves but to you they ministered those things", 1 Pet 1: 11-12. Isaiah, it says, saw His glory and spoke of Him, John 12: 41. Yet what did he know of Christ? Nothing like what we know of Christ. I suppose he really writes for our time, although the saints in a coming dispensation will no doubt read this and get the help from his prophecy in a special way, it having a peculiar application to them, but it has an application to us now. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed?" Can you answer that question, dear young friend?

Sometimes when you are young you may look at older ones and see them enjoying the truth - they are saved and you wonder what it takes to save a person. God has used, since the Lord's death and resurrection, principally one means of saving persons from their sins, and that is the gospel. He has used it through persons preaching the gospel, and He has used it through persons receiving that preaching of the gospel. He uses your ears, just to be simple about it; God has entrance to you through your ears. I am not to look, in the present day, for public miracles or great demonstrations of divine power; God is speaking to persons in the gospel. If you are going to get help in the gospel at all, if you are going to be saved, you must accept that God is speaking to you through persons in the gospel. You must accept that. That is God's chosen way to salvation. He may use some material means; He may use some means of arresting your progress, but God is saving persons through persons speaking the gospel. That is the report: "Who hath believed our report?" Friend, if you accept it as the word of God, and it has gone in, and you feel a pang in your conscience,

it is God who is speaking to you through His word. He uses the word, and He uses the reception of that to save persons. God is saving persons through simply speaking to them of Christ. I cannot persuade you to become a believer; I cannot persuade you that Jesus is the Christ; it is not in my power. I do not have the means to bring that about, but I can simply say in faith that the Lord Jesus is my Saviour, and I find Him to be the One that saved me from my sins. And I know that He is the only means of salvation for you; you must accept that, otherwise, the Lord says, you will die in your sins. Awful thing!

I remember hearing of Mr Coates. After he had preached the gospel for the first time, an older brother approached him and asked how he could tell people, 'Christ died for our sins; and that if they did not believe they would die in their sins', as they were contrary statements., CAC volume 28 - Notes of Readings on Matthew's Gospel p152. One of the two is true. Either Christ died for your sins (1 Cor 15: 3), or you will die in your sins, John 8: 24. Thank God, that I can say that Christ died for my sins. I trust that Christ died for your sins. He has borne the sins of many (Heb 8: 28); the Bible does not say He died for *the sins of* all, although He did die that all might believe and be saved.

What we come to in Isaiah 53 is another Man - another kind of Man, a Man that derived nothing from what was here. "For he shall grow up before him as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground". You can understand the figure being used is a young tree that does not derive its sap, its fruitfulness, its moisture from what is here. Jesus came here as a Man, yielding precedence to nothing that had previously existed, though He acknowledged the law and all that was of God. He took everything from heaven; He derived from heaven, His was a glorious manhood that was not of this earth; it was not an earthly manhood; it was another order of manhood. He required nothing that man could give; man could add nothing to Christ. He was a different kind of Man; no flattery had any inroads to Christ. No slight, no insult, had any adverse effect; this was a kind of Man that took His bearings from God. He entirely took His bearings from heaven. "There is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and left alone of men." Men could not understand this kind of man. "A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief... Surely *he* hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

We spoke about Christ being the Head of every man. When did that begin to be? If you look at the history of Christ when He was here

on earth, you will find that every person that approached Christ was answered. There was no one that went away unsatisfied; they may have gone away unsatisfied with what was in themselves. The young man who came to Jesus had much riches, but he did not go away unsatisfied with what he found in Christ; he found an answer, not only to what he desired and needed, but an answer to himself. I think that is the Head; He has got the answer for everything; that is the Man we are presenting in the gospel. He is the answer to absolutely everything. When you are young you have cares and troubles at school; and your friendships and other things become huge difficulties to you, and loom large in your life; they become such that you may wonder if the Lord Jesus can really help you in these things. But I just say simply; there is nothing that the Lord cannot help you with. When you get to the Lord Jesus and go over these things with Him, you realise and recognise that the problem is you. The problem is your will, what you want, and I want, and I need; and I like things to be this way, and I want things to go this way, and I would like things to be my own way; I like things to suit myself. The more and more you go to the Lord you realise that is the problem; the problem is you. And the one Man can answer it. He will take your eye off yourself, and take it on to another perfect, blessed Man before God. "*He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*"; that is not a once and for all matter; He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows. Older brothers and sisters in the testimony know what it is to have griefs and sorrows, and they know what it is to have some sense of the Lord carrying them, and being with them in it. "*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities*"; He took up everything for man, and He took up everything for God. What a blessed Man He is.

He did not suffer, friend, for His own sins; He had no sins. God did not mete out upon Him in judgment anything that was due to Him personally; He did not suffer on His own account; He was perfect. He only suffered vicariously - for others. He bore my sins. It says here, "*He bore the sin of many*" v 12. "*All we like sheep have gone astray*"; here He comes in as a Man ready to bear sins, ready to be "*wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.*" He suffered, He died, and He rose again, on our account. It is helpful to go over these fundamental facts of the gospel. On the mount of transfiguration there was an exclamation from heaven, from the Father, about His delight being found in His Son; there was perfection there.

But then, in order that we should come in to this, the Lord Jesus had to suffer, and He had to die, and He had to shed His blood because God required that blood from man. He required righteousness; God must be righteous. In order to save me, and to save you, He must be seen to be righteous. In order to be seen to be righteous, our sinful blood could never atone for sins; He must claim the blood of a sinless, righteous Man. If I am to be saved, the Lord Jesus must die in my place, in place of my sins, in place of my life which was required of God for the sins I committed. He became my substitute on the cross. He shed His blood; He gave up His life in order that I should live. He shed His own precious blood for me. Scripture speaks of righteous blood, "the blood of righteous Abel" (Matt 23: 45), but the blood of the Lord Jesus far exceeds that righteous blood; no blood like that was ever shed. That blood has satisfied God. The blood was put on the mercy-seat in the old dispensation; it is the greatest application of the blood which we know, Lev 16: 14. It is available to all. The whole root principle of sin was judged and met there through the sacrifice of Christ. Tremendous matter!

Romans 5 gives us the Man we have been speaking of. I know this scripture is difficult to follow in the wording of it. But Mr Taylor comments that Romans is a logical epistle, JT vol 94 p140. There is nothing that goes against sense, or logic; it is absolutely true, and can be seen to be true. Paul says that sin came into the world, and through that, death came in; and that was by Adam, one man. "By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death". But over against the sin that came in, there was one Man that came in and brought in grace, abundant grace. He did that through His suffering and His death on the cross, but also in His life. It has been helpfully said that Romans 5 gives us the moral qualification of Christ to be Head of every man; that means, to my understanding of it, not only that Christ was morally great - He was the greatest Man that ever lived, and the only Man that always pleased God, morally supreme, superior to every other man - but, not only was He morally great, for Him to be Head of every man He must be great enough to meet the liabilities that lay on man. To put it simply, there is no point in being head of man if man is left still in his sins and would die in his sins. If Christ's going to be Head of every man he must be able to bring man into blessing; into life. He must be able to do some good for man, and man in the flesh was only going on to death. So, the moral qualification for Christ to be Head to man is that He can remove the liabilities that lie on every man and bring him into life. That is a

wonderful thing! It shows the greatness of Christ. He had to accomplish reconciliation; He had to put you on a sure footing with God, because He is your Head. He represents you, if you will have Him, before God. So, He can go before God with persons that are qualified - persons who can stand before God. Is that not wonderful? What a Head; what a person! No wonder you can go into the street and say to any man, 'Christ is your Head. He has done everything for you. The Head is your Saviour; He is your Lord. Come into these things! He can save you; He can bring you into all these things; He is qualified for it'. There is no one else who could do that. Other persons will set themselves up. We read in the reading of someone who is going to set himself up in the place of God (the antichrist); he will not be able to do anything for man; he will have no moral qualifications whatsoever. So, "by the disobedience of the one man the many have been constituted sinners" - that is what Adam brought in; he brought in sinners; everyone became a sinner through Adam. But "by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted righteous". What a Man that is, able to bring about righteous persons, and give them life. He is going to bring them into newness of life in the next chapter; He is going to give them the Holy Spirit. The woman is told in John 4: 14 of "the water which I shall give him"- that is Christ, who gives the water, and the Holy Spirit, Christ says, "shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up". He does not only say it will be the Holy Spirit as a power. I wonder if sometimes we consider if the Holy Spirit has such a power that, if we did not have Him, we would be a sort of husk. It says, "become in him": that is, the Spirit channels the affections of the believer in right lines, springing up to enjoy heavenly things, eternal life; the Spirit actually in the believer. Think of the greatness of the One who is able to do that, and reconcile persons to God and give them living water. You have a source in the Spirit within yourself, your affections set on right lines, and rightly in relation with God.

The woman in Matthew 15 was an example of this. What you get in Romans 5 is someone who comes to the need of the grace of God which has come in through Christ. That is that Christ becomes, in Romans 5, the test of every man. God is not saying to man tonight, 'Unless you do such and such you will die in your sins'; God is saying tonight, 'I have presented a Man to you, and that Man is everything I have ever looked for, and He is everything that you will ever need'. He is saying, 'That Man has come with all the grace, and all the truth, and all the compassion, and all the love that you will ever need. He will

present you in a place before Him in heaven'. He is not saying you need to conform to a set of rules; He is not saying you need to put your signature at the bottom of a list of doctrine or laws; He is not saying that at all: He is saying, 'This is my Man; this is Christ'. You must have Him, and He is your only means of salvation. There is no other way of salvation. The answer is a Man, and the gospel is about a Man. This woman is one of the countless that came to the Lord Jesus in His life here. She was from Tyre and Sidon; she was not an Israelitish woman; she was a Canaanitish woman, coming out of those borders toward the Mediterranean. She was outside the normal range of blessing. We know the teaching of this section, but it is worthwhile going over it. She says, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David" - she appealed to the Lord Jesus on the basis of Him being Son of David. She was not a Jew so she had no claim on the Lord in that regard. While her case had merit, the Lord did not even answer her - He said in effect, 'You ought to know that you are not a Jew, and you have absolutely no claim on me in this regard'. He was not averse to persons coming to Him, but she could not come to Him on these terms.

She perseveres. The disciples say, "Dismiss her, for she cries after us". He answers saying, "I have not been sent save to the lost sheep of Israel's house". That was the commission He had from God, to come in in regard to Israel and to save Israel. "She came and did him homage, saying, Lord, help me." Now she is getting help; she just admits her own need. She recognises He is Lord and that He is what she needs, but she is not far enough. You might say she is far enough, but the Lord is going to bring her truly into a knowledge of Himself. He says, "It is not well to take the bread of the children", that is, the Israelitish nation, "and cast it to the dogs". Dogs speak of those that are without the range of blessing; dogs are left outside the house, they suggest those who are outside the blessing. The Lord was saying that was not the commission He had, and He was not going to act outwith what God had given Him. And she says, "Yea, Lord; for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the table of their masters". She says, effectively, 'I know that God is so superabundant in grace, that even some of the grace which is towards Israel, will spill over the edge, and fall to me, who am absolutely not deserving of it whatsoever'; that is what she came to. Mr Darby said as to this that she knew God ten thousand times better than all the disciples that were there, *Collected Writings* vol 12 p156. This poor woman knew that God in His grace, as appealed to in pure grace, must answer her. That is a wonderful thing.

People try to mix grace; they try and say, 'Yes, I want to believe and be saved, but I think there is a bit of good in me, and it will be saved', or, 'I am not such a bad chap after all; I do not mind being saved, but I will work my way through this passage; I will conform to the law and be good enough'. The only means of salvation is pure unalloyed grace, and that is, God has supplied every single thing in another Man. All you need to do is accept it in another Man; that is the pure and simple fact of the gospel. The Head has come in lacking not one single thing that you require; He has come in with it all, and all you need, and what you must do is acknowledge that blessed Man as your Lord and Saviour. That is where the blessing comes from, not from any creed, or doctrine, or law, or other things. It is a Man; you need a Man; everybody needs a Man. That Man is Jesus Christ.

“Then Jesus answering said to her, O Woman, thy faith is great. Be it to thee as thou desirest. And her daughter was healed from *that* hour.” What faith! Faith is what brings you into it, friend. We spoke about the report going out, and maybe it is going into your soul, and maybe something is niggling at your conscience; maybe you realise that these things are right; maybe things are beginning to stir your conscience. What you need is faith - faith to lay hold of the word of God. And faith to see in Christ what God sees in Christ, faith to see in Christ what others see in Christ. Would you like to see what these brothers and sister here, who have known the Lord a long time, see in Christ, dear young friend? Would you like to understand why they love Christ so much? Get to God, and ask for faith. Ask to see what there is in Christ for your salvation and blessing. Come to know Him as your Saviour; that is the first great step. Great Man that He is! I trust we have presented something of that great blessed Man, a blessed different kind of man, different from any other man, but One who has come with everything for your salvation.

May you do so, for His Name's sake.

Linlithgow

7th January 2018

THE WATCHMAN'S CALL

David A Barlow

Isaiah 21: 11, 12

John 21: 19 (from “And having”) -22

Acts 8: 26-31 (to “guide me?”)

My impression for this occasion is the way, and being guided in the way. In this first scripture I want to take up the application that the “Watchman” would be the gospel preacher. You think of the world outside as it goes on in utter darkness. There is nothing, no hope in the world that rejected Christ, just utter darkness. I read just before coming out of the conversion of one hymn writer, William Cowper. As he was walking through a churchyard one night, while a sexton was digging a grave, his leg suddenly struck an object which turned out to be a human skull. It came to him then that whatever he tried to escape in this world, whatever he did, his end would still be this, emptiness and death. That is the reality; it is the portion of all in this life. There is nothing in this world, just darkness. Man does seek guidance; there is plenty of evidence for that. Ever since communication has expanded there seems to be an ever increasing number of options that would attract followers to this and that, the political scene has perhaps never been more complicated, and for those without a political mind you could look at idols such as celebrities or sports heroes; there is always something that man is seeking but really it is utter darkness.

However, God has seen that, throughout the course of this world, there has been a watchman. There have been those that are watching; that are looking. What are they looking for? The coming of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. There are passages of Scripture which speak of His coming again; and the Lord tells His disciples what the signs will be before He comes in glory. Our eyes need to be lifted to look for His coming and be ready. He says, “I come quickly”, Rev 22: 7. In the meantime the preacher is here to be a watchman, to be ready for God, to be able to speak God's word. Maybe the preacher is listening out for someone to say, “Watchman, what of the night?”. Maybe there is an exercised soul, realising the condition they are in as a needy, poor, lost sinner; realising that they have to do with a holy and righteous God; and seeing how far short they come. So the cry is, “what of the night?” - what hope is there? The watchman's response is, “The morning cometh, and also the night”.

Today, the morning has come. Someone has endured

everything that rightly should have fallen on me as a lost and needy sinner: the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What a Saviour He is! The morning is here; resurrection morning. The Lord is the One who not only took on the sins that we have committed but also the guilt of sin, and the question of sin itself; how complete that is. A judge might be able to say that, although all of your sins have been proven and you clearly deserve condemnation, you may be let off nonetheless; that is the best this world could offer. With God, it is justification: the guilt has all gone as well. In a court system, as you were discharged, you would perhaps be thankful for that, but you would be right still to feel the weight and guilt of what you had committed. Not so with God; the Lord Himself has not only borne our sins, He has also born the guilt of them before a holy and righteous God. What God offers is justification by faith in that beloved One. What a gospel we have to announce.

What a morning; there was never a morning like this resurrection morning. God can come out; it speaks of it when the Lord went into death: “the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom”, Matt 27: 51. It was not just that God would come out for some things, but He can come out fully in His blessing for mankind; “rent from the top to the bottom”. God's full thoughts are made known. And what a morning it was when the Lord rose from the dead, “raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father”, Rom 6: 4. He could say to His own, “I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”, John 20: 17.

What a gospel! The wonderful thing is that it may be yours by faith. May it never become commonplace to accept what the Lord did for His own on the cross, that He endured everything for us. He is now crowned with glory and honour;

Repentance only, God requires from man,
And faith in Christ, His well-beloved Son. (Hymn 123)

Surely the “morning cometh”; the morning has come. The warning in the gospel is, “and also the night”. We do not know when the Lord will come to call His own, those who have been washed in His precious shed blood, to be with Himself forever and the opportunity in the gospel will end. What that blood means to God; how precious it is, capable of cleansing from every sin. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”, 1 John 1: 7. The One who is raised and crowned with glory and honour is coming again, but then the night. For the world here that will be it: no more warning, just the night. How important *now* is. You think of the apathy and indifference of man, but

the night is coming; how terrible! Paul says, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men", 2 Cor 5: 11.

Do you know the Lord as your personal Saviour? The gospel appeal is still to you now; what a God we have to do with. He goes on to say, "if ye will inquire, inquire; return, come". It says, "return". If perhaps we have grown cold in our affections, the Lord is still the same. His heart is still towards you and He would call you to return, return to His fold, return to where His love pervades all. This world can get down on us and get upon us; if it cannot attract us it perhaps beats us down. The Lord, if we have grown cold in our affections, would call us to return, return to Him. He is ever available for us. Then it says, "Come"; if you have not come before, come now. Do not leave it, do not wait another moment; the night is coming, return and come. What an appeal there is in the gospel. All the preacher can do is point to Christ and say, 'He is my all, and He can be your all too'. He has endured all the judgment for sins that rightly fell upon me. I love Him, and my desire is to present Him to you as the only Saviour for sinners. You can rely on nothing else; it is Christ alone: may He be magnified, may He be glorified. What a privilege it is for the gospel preacher to speak of the One who saved him and He can be presented as the One who can save anyone, anyone that will. 'Whosoever will', as we sometimes sing, Hymn 439.

The next scripture I read speaks of following the Lord. I wondered whether that might link a little with the way and being guided. We sung of there being only one way to salvation; 'God's blessed way of liberty', and our footsteps should haste, Hymn 276. There is One to follow; and that is the Lord Jesus. You consider His path here and the idea is that you in your experience, and I in my experience, should follow Him. He is to be our Guide; we are to walk in His footsteps. I wonder whether we need to consider what it means to follow Jesus. He was rejected in this world. He says to His disciples, "Whosoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me", Mark 8: 34. His call is to you and to me, and we are to follow Him and Him alone. We touched in the reading today about having affection for Him; and being His friend. May we be stimulated to have ever increasing affection for the One who has gone the whole way for us. We think of the experience of Peter, one who truly loved the Lord and had real affection for Him. He was willing to die for the Lord, or so he thought. How he must have felt it when he then denied the Lord; he "wept bitterly", Matt 26: 75. Here the Lord in wonderful grace is restoring Peter and telling him, "Follow me". Peter had just had a hard word. He had just been told that when he was old he would be taken

where he would not desire. He had had a sense of knowing he would go a way that naturally he would not want. That was a hard word, maybe he felt that and he looked around maybe to deflect something of that. He looked at another brother and said, "what of this man?". Sometimes I feel that temptation; I look around and see someone else, and I ask, 'What about him, and how about him?'. The Lord's word to each of us is, "what is it to thee? Follow thou me". We are to have our eyes upon Him. It is not our own ideas of what it means to follow the Lord; it is just to follow Him in simplicity in love for Him and having our eyes upon Him. Our eyes lifted up to where He is in the glory, to follow Him. Peter and John did not have their own ideas as to what to do to follow Him. They did not go in different ways; their object was the same. When John wrote this Peter had already been martyred; he was already resting in the Lord. Was John on some sort of different path? No! He knew what it was to be on the island called Patmos for the testimony of Jesus, Rev 1: 9. They had both followed Jesus in their individual pathway, and they found a link together and they found fellowship together following Him: "Follow thou me".

The pathway is hard, I am sure it is, but we are in a scene that has rejected Christ. We are to be different. We are to be lights in the world. We are to be a testimony in our pathway down here, and we are that by following the Lord. What a perfect Guide He is. The hymn writer says,

Lord, we love to trace Thy footprints
Here amidst the desert sand

Hymn 77.

Do we? Read the gospels and see the way the Lord moved in perfect blessed humility always answering to the will of His God and Father in His desire to follow Him, in love for Him. May this be a word for us, "Follow thou me", may we all do that.

I wanted to link this third scripture to the work of the Holy Spirit. I have a lot of sympathy for this Ethiopian. You can picture the scene; he had had a long journey to come and worship at Jerusalem. The Lord says as to the woman in John 4, "Ye worship ye know not what", v 22. The Ethiopian was coming to worship what he did not know. He had made an extremely long journey to worship at Jerusalem and he had gone away with a book, the prophet Isaiah, and he was reading it but it did not seem to be intelligible. There is mention of a number of nations in Isaiah but there is no mention as to the Ethiopians coming into blessing, and the part he had reached just did not make sense to him. He knew there was something there; he had read quite a bit of the book.

If he had started the roll at the beginning, he had read up to what we know as chapter 53, and there were hints about somebody that maybe he had noticed. There is the reference to the Branch (Isa 11: 1); it speaks of “a man more precious than fine gold” (Isa 13: 12), and the man whose name is, “Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace”, Isa 9: 6. He had maybe noticed this; it did not seem to be intelligible; but he continued to search, and he knew he needed a guide. We need a guide, beloved hearers. What he did not yet know was that there was already a divine working in his precious soul. This man was going on his journey, reading this book, searching and not understanding, but the Spirit had gone before. He called Philip to draw alongside to open up the precious truths of the Bible to him; the precious truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. What a guide the Spirit is. He “searches all things, even the depths of God”, 1 Cor 2: 10. The Lord said of Him, “he shall guide you into all the truth”, John 16: 13.

Let us rely upon the Holy Spirit. We have been reminded that He has come to take control. He has come to take control of your life; He has come to take control of mine, and He would desire to open up in this wonderful book the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. May we allow more room for Him to work, and may we let go the things of this world that ever increasingly distract and take up our time, so that the Spirit has an ever increasing opportunity to open up the precious truths, treasure in heaven, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. What a blessing this Ethiopian man had! He was searching, he needed a guide and the Holy Spirit became His Guide. There came a point when he did not need Philip any longer “he went on his way rejoicing”. His eyes had been lifted to a Man in the glory and he was rejoicing. Truly then the Spirit was his guide. May we in our own simple way prove the experience of being guided here by the Holy Spirit, walk in the way that has been set on by the Lord Himself and be a testimony, be a watchman for the coming day. May it be the portion for all - what a gospel!

May the Lord bless the word.

West Norwood

13th May 2018